

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE NEW YORK, NEW HAVEN & HARTFORD RAILROAD NEAR EAST HARTFORD, CONN., ON FEBRUARY 2, 1931.

February 26, 1931.

To the Commission:

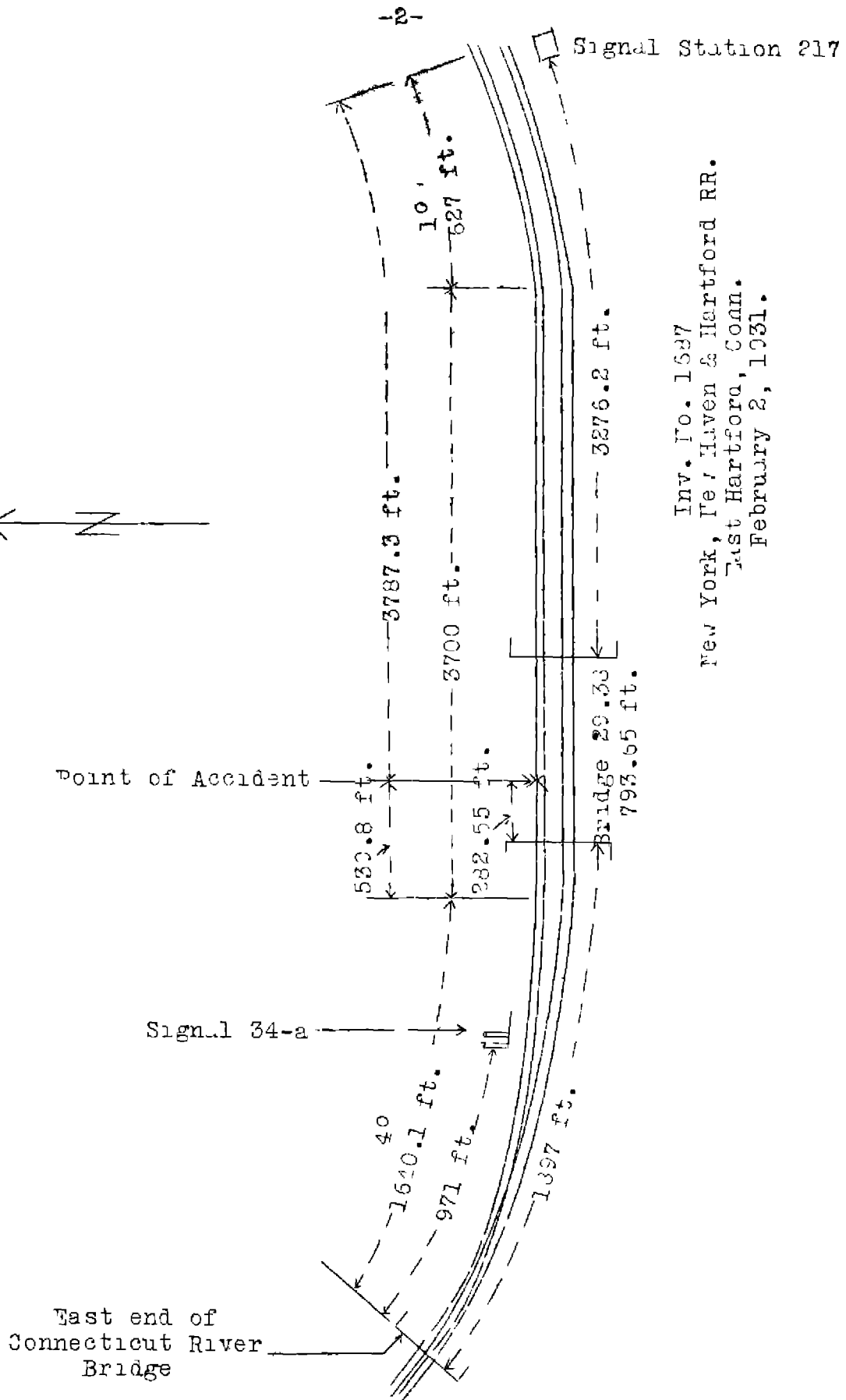
On February 2, 1931, there was a rear-end collision between a transfer train and a light engine on the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad near East Hartford, Conn., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of two employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Hartford Division extending between Hartford and East Hartford, a distance of 2.61 miles, in the immediate vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line, within yard and interlocking limits. Signal station 217 is located at the west end of the west yard at East Hartford; bridge 29.38, 793.65 feet in length, is located 3,276.2 feet west of signal station 217 and the accident occurred on this bridge, on the westbound track, at a point 283.55 feet from the western end, or 3,787.3 feet west of signal station 217; the bridge is 21 feet high at the point of accident. Approaching the point of accident from the east, there is a 1° curve to the right 627 feet in length, and 3,700 feet of tangent track, followed by a 4° curve to the right 1,640.1 feet in length, the accident occurring on this tangent track at a point 539.8 feet from its western end. The grade is 0.55 per cent descending for westbound trains.

Bridge 29.93 over the Connecticut River is located 1,897 feet west of bridge 29.38 and the trackage over this bridge consists of a gauntlet track, westbound movements over the gauntlet track being governed by signal 34-a, controlled from an interlocking tower located west of the bridge, signal 34-a is located 971 feet east of the bridge.

The weather was clear and there was snow on the ground and a full moon shining at the time of the accident, which occurred at 6.30 p.m.



Inv. No. 1537
 New York, New Haven & Hartford RR.
 East Hartford, Conn.
 February 2, 1931.

Description

The transfer train consisted of 27 cars, hauled by engine 3403, and was in charge of Conductor Donlon and Engineman Agans. This train departed from East Hartford Yard at 6.22 p.m., continued westward on the westbound track, stopped at signal 34-a, which was in the stop position, to permit an eastbound train to pass over the gauntlet track, and had been standing about five minutes when its rear end was struck by light engine 3224.

Westbound light engine 3224, in charge of Engineman Dooley and Fireman Moore, departed from East Hartford Yard at 6.27 p.m., and collided with the rear end of the transfer train while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 10 and 15 miles per hour.

The transfer train was moved forward a distance of about one and one-half car-lengths, and the last two cars in this train were damaged. Engine 3224 was derailed. The employee killed was the rear brakeman, and those injured were the engineman and fireman, all of the transfer train.

Summary of evidence

Conductor T. J. Donlon, of the transfer train, stated that while standing at signal 34-a waiting for train No. 138 to pass, he and the head brakeman were sitting on the fireman's side of the cab and the fireman and engineman were in the gangway. The train was shoved ahead a distance of about one and one-half car-lengths and he shouted to one of the others to apply the brakes, as he saw train No. 138 approaching over the Connecticut River bridge. The fireman applied the brakes and the head brakeman jumped off with a red lantern and flagged the approaching train. Conductor Donlon said that he did not know whether or not any indication was displayed at the rear end of his train in this instance, or on previous occasions, as he usually depended upon Rear Brakeman Van Casbeck to attend to that, since he was an experienced and competent man. He did not know whether or not Brakeman Van Casbeck had a red lantern, but said he had a white lantern when he saw him last just before they departed from East Hartford, the brakeman was then going toward the rear of the train. It further appeared from his statements that his crew was working later than usual on the day of the accident, and that they would often reach Hartford around 5 p.m. and did not always need a red lantern, although proper equipment was always available for his crew at signal tower 217. He stated

that he was fully aware that a red signal must be displayed on the rear end of a train, although it was not necessary to provide rear-end protection within yard limits except against first-class trains.

Head Brakeman J. J. Donlon, of the transfer train, stated that when he last saw Rear Brakeman Van Gasbeck, the latter was carrying a white lantern and was walking toward the rear end of the train, just before they departed from East Hartford yard, and he did not see him with a red lantern at any time. After the accident, Brakeman Van Gasbeck's body was found under the trestle, with his white lantern lying beside him, and Brakeman Donlon was of the opinion that Brakeman Van Gasbeck had fallen through the trestle between the two tracks; no red lantern could be found.

Fireman Cooper, of the transfer train, stated that during the past few months it had been dark before they completed their work, he also said that he did not see the rear brakeman with a red lantern on the night of the accident, although he had seen him with a red lantern on previous occasions. No statement was taken from Engineman Agans, who was slightly injured in the accident.

Engineman Dooley, of engine 3224, stated that he was operating his engine at a speed of about 10 miles per hour and had reached the trestle on which the accident occurred when he saw train No. 138 approaching over the Connecticut River bridge, and as he dimmed his headlight he saw a tank car about an engine-length distant, and at once called a warning and applied the air brakes in emergency. He had been looking out of the side cab window while en route, and the fireman was sitting on his seat box when he last saw him as they passed over Prospect Street Crossing, located about 800 feet east of the trestle. There were no markers on the last car of the transfer train; he saw no light of any kind nor did he see the rear brakeman, and he was not aware of the fact that this transfer train was ahead of him. After the accident he saw the rear brakeman's body lying under the trestle and from its position he was of the opinion that he must have fallen from the south or left side of the train. Engineman Dooley further stated that when they reached Prospect Street, he saw signal 34-a in the stop position, they usually found this signal in the stop position at this time and often waited at this point for train No. 138 to pass. He also stated that while there was a full moon and snow on the ground, yet it was dark on the trestle as there was no snow on it. He was not expecting to find a flag, but did expect to find lights on the rear of any train occupying the main track after dark.

Fireman Moore, of engine 3234, stated that he was sitting on his seat box approaching Prospect Street crossing, located about 300 feet east of the point of accident; the headlight was burning properly and he was on the lookout for automobiles at the crossing, but after passing that point he was busy attending to his fire and the first he knew of anything wrong was when the engineman called to him. He looked up and saw that the engineman had applied the air brakes in emergency and had the reverse lever in back motion, the collision occurring immediately afterwards. Fireman Moore estimated the speed of his engine to have been 15 miles per hour at the time of the accident.

Telegraph Operator Johnston, on duty at signal station 217, stated that the members of the train crew of the transfer train have lockers in the lower room of the tower, where they keep their equipment, and that Brakeman Van Gasbeck came to the tower about 4.30 p.m. on the day of the accident for his signal equipment. Operator Johnston said that he had agreed to close the switch after the transfer train passed the tower, and after it passed he saw Brakeman Van Gasbeck, who was on the north side of the tank car, which was the last car in the transfer, give a "highball" with a white lantern; he did not see him have a red lantern, nor did he see a red light on the rear of the car. He stated that flagmen did not always place a red signal at the rear, but usually carried their lanterns with them wherever they stood on the rear car. Engine 3234 passed the tower a short time after the transfer train, and he saw a red lantern on the tender just above the draw bar.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Dooley, of light engine 3234, to maintain a proper lookout within yard limits and to be prepared to stop before overtaking a preceding train, a contributing cause was the failure of the crew of the transfer train to display a red signal at the rear of their train.

Engineman Dooley stated that he was looking out of the side cab window and saw signal 34-a in the stop position and train No. 138 approaching over the Connecticut River bridge, and apparently his attention was so concentrated on the approaching train that he entirely failed to see the transfer train on the trestle just ahead of him until too late to avert the accident.

Rule 19-a provides that if the rear of a train is not equipped with brackets for marker lamps, a red signal must be displayed, but Rear Brakeman Van Gasbeck apparently did not have a red lantern with him at any time, while Engineman Dooley said he did not see a light of any kind on the rear of the train. From the evidence adduced it could not be definitely determined the position he was occupying at the time of the accident, about eight minutes prior thereto he was seen on the rear of his train with a white lantern, but it is entirely possible that he may have alighted from his train, which had been standing on the trestle about five minutes, and accidentally fell between the tracks to the ground 21 feet below, where his body was found. In any event, however, it was incumbent on Rear Brakeman Van Gasbeck to display a red lantern at the rear of his train, and it was also the duty of Conductor Donlon to know that the rear brakeman had provided himself with the proper signal equipment. The evidence indicated that the requirements regarding the display of a red light on the rear of these transfer trains is not always observed, and this is something which should be corrected at the earliest opportunity.

All of the employees involved were experienced men, and at the time of the accident none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.